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JMJ

U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

VOL. 5 - THE CHRISTIAN'S LAST END

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EASTER

The Justice and Short Duration of the Trials of the Just and the Prosperity of the Wicked

"You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice." St. John 16:20.

To whom does Our Savior say that? To his Apostles and disciples, and with them to all pious, just, and chosen servants of God. "But the world shall rejoice." What is that world?

The wicked, perverse world, and all those who are attached to it and to its sinful customs, while they resist the holy teaching and maxims of the Gospel of Christ, that is, sinners and the wicked; they shall live in joy and abundance. I ask is that right? To weep and lament; is that the reward our dear Lord promises to the good? Joy and abundance; is that the punishment with which He threatens the wicked? If He had said quite the contrary, for instance, you, my children, shall enjoy prosperity, while the wicked, who despise me, shall suffer affliction, then we might have understood Him. So we often think, my dear brethren, with secret envy and discontent, when we judge according to the dictates of the flesh and our sensuality. But we should not think so, for

I. *That the just should live in afflictions here below and the wicked in prosperity is according to God's decree: therefore no just man should complain; but neither should the sinner persist in his evil ways.*

II. *The afflictions of the just and the prosperity of the wicked last only a short time: therefore no just man should envy sinners their luck; but neither should any sinner boast of it.*

Are we to believe that sin and vice is the road to temporal well being? Yet it is from God that all blessings and goods must come. What more contradictory, then, than to maintain that to attain prosperity we must despise and offend Him from whom all goods and graces must come. And if they alone who offend God enjoy wealth, health and prosperity, what poor, distressed mortal would not prefer to live in sin, that things might go better with Him? If the pious, who serve God with zeal, are to be the only ones to suffer poverty, sickness, and contempt, what rich man would venture to do penance and run the risk of living in misery? But that is not the case at all.

On the contrary, sin and wickedness is the source from which all the miseries and troubles of life come.

Did not Saul in olden times gain a royal crown by his virtue and piety and lose it by becoming wicked? If David ever had to suffer misfortune, it was when he forgot his God and committed the shameful crimes of adultery and murder. When and how did the wonderful good fortune of Solomon begin to decline? Was it not when that king and his successors began to practice idolatry? "As long as they sinned not in the sight of their God it was well with them: for their God hateth iniquity" (Judith 5:21,18). So that it is not alone those who lead bad lives who enjoy prosperity, although the world nowadays is apt to have recourse to unjust means to secure it; and the same just God still lives and rules the world, and iniquity is still hateful in his sight. And, alas! how many are there not in the world who have hardly a bit of dry bread to eat, and lead wretched lives in sorrow and affliction, hunger and want, and yet, because they are wicked and sinful, shall be cast into hell when the time

comes to separate the wheat from the chaff! Sinners, do not persist in your evil ways! Wickedness is not the door to good luck and prosperity.

Yet many of the wicked abound in prosperity, while many of the just are severely tried. It is this inequality that generally causes us to murmur as at a thing that we cannot understand. Is it right, we ask, to see the rich glutton, whose only care is to gratify his appetites, seated at a well-spread table, while the righteous Lazarus lies at his doorstep, perishing with hunger and begging for the crumbs from the rich man's table, a charity that is cruelly refused him? What an intolerable thing to see men who have nothing of the Christian but the bare name, while they are no better than heathens in their lives and actions, enjoying such an abundance of all things, while true servants of God, who mean so well towards their Lord, have hardly enough clothes to enable them to make a decent appearance in church! Can such an arrangement come from a God of infinite wisdom, holiness, and justice? Can He act so harshly towards his friends, while He is so generous to his enemies? We are not the only ones who entertain such thoughts. Even the holiest have found it hard to understand this. "I see," says St. Augustine, "before my eyes a most difficult problem" to understand, namely, how to reconcile the justice of God and his all ruling providence with the claims of equity and right, when I behold sinners generally prosperous on earth, while the good are tormented by temptations, persecutions, and trials. "It is a most difficult thing to explain." The prophets of God studied the same point, and had to confess that it puzzled them. "Why," asks Jeremias in astonishment, "why doth the way of the wicked prosper; why is it well with all them that transgress and do wickedly?" Why is this, O Lord? This was the very thing that the heathens of old upbraided the Christians with. What sort of a God have you? said they. Where are His justice and goodness towards you? You are poor and despised; hunted from one city to another, tortured and persecuted and crucified alive. Is your God blind that He does not see those things? Or has He forgotten you, that He takes such little interest in you? He must be either unwilling or unable to help you; if He is unable, He is no God; if He is unwilling, it is to no purpose you serve such a merciless Lord.

Far from the Christian be such thoughts and complaints! Sufficient for us to keep us resigned should be the words in which David speaks of his doubts in this matter: "I studied that I might know this thing," I tried to find out the reason of it, but in vain; therefore I determined to suspend my judgment, to submit humbly to the divine decrees, and to wait "until I go into the sanctuary of God, and understand concerning their last ends" (Ps. 72).

Such should be our thoughts in circumstances which to our weak understandings appear strange and incomprehensible, so that we may be always undisturbed and content with the will of God. Many other mysteries still more incomprehensible are proposed to us by our faith: for instance, the Blessed Trinity of three Persons in one Nature, and that there is one only God in the three Persons; that Jesus Christ is here present in the smallest particle of a consecrated Host. How can such things be? is the question that my understanding sometimes asks. I cannot comprehend it. But is my not understanding it a reason for saying that it is not true, or for wavering in my faith? God forbid! I need only say to myself: God has said it; and then I can at once conclude with certainty that it must be true. Now, I am just as certain that God cannot ordain anything that is not right and just, as He cannot say anything that is not true. Therefore when I sometimes feel an inclination to bitterness of spirit on considering the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the just, and am not able to explain the cause of either, must I then murmur and say that an injustice has been committed? May God preserve me from such thoughts! I should rather at once say to myself: God has so ordered it; it is His will; therefore it must be good, right and just (St. Matthew 11:26). "Yea, Father, for so hath it seemed good in Thy sight." And in fact when I consider how short is the miserable joy of the wicked, I find that I have not merely no cause to complain, but also no reason for congratulating them, or envying them in the least.

II. Generally speaking, the complaints we make and the discontent we feel do not arise from our own wants nor from temporal goods as they are in themselves, but rather from a secret envy and spirit of grudging. If we men were alike in all things and no one had more than his neighbor, then we should all be satisfied, although no one might have much; for every one would think: it must be so. Again, if each one imagined he had something more or better than others, he would be not only content, but would esteem himself very fortunate. The peasant who never left his native village, and who, on account of the extent of his lands, is obliged to keep a horse more than his neighbors, looks on himself as the richest and most fortunate in the whole place; but if he goes into the town and sees the rich equipages of the wealthy, alas! he thinks, poor man that I am! how rich the people are

here! And he who was so happy before goes home discontented. Why? He is just as well off as before. Yes, but now he sees that others have more than he; and therefore his own condition now seems despicable to him.

In this matter we resemble little children. Suppose there are four or five of them together in a household; their mother gives them their breakfast as usual in the morning; each one gets a piece of rye bread, spread with butter, with a cup of coffee or milk, but all receive the same. They are all quite satisfied and fall to with great gusto, munching their bread with such eagerness that it quite gives one an appetite to look at them. But suppose now that one of the children, a brother or sister, perhaps on account of being more delicate than the others, gets a piece of white bread instead of rye, and maybe a morsel of meat in addition, oh, what a to-do there is in the house about it! All is upset and in disorder; the little ones begin to cry and howl, and look with disgust on what they before liked so well. Why so? Is the rye bread more insipid to them or coarser than before? No; but the bit of white bread or meat given to one excites the envy of the others. Be still! children, says the mother; your brother is sick, and must perhaps soon take to his bed and die; and what more has he had than the rest of you, except a bit of meat? And as he has eaten it in a hurry, he has just as little as you now. Be satisfied with what you have. But it is all to no purpose; the brother may be sick or not; the others make no account of that, and they would rather be sick themselves, or pretend to be so, than get less than he.

Such is the way in which children act; but old people are often not much better. They have the authority of age and the vices of youth. Our great Father in heaven distributes daily to us mortals his food and other goods, according to his own will; to one He gives more, to another less, and indeed, as we have seen already, those who seem to deserve it least receive the greater portion, that is, sinners and the wicked; and thereby arises much envy, grudging and discontent. Why does he get so much, asks the dissatisfied man, and I so little? He has white bread, while I have hardly enough black bread to still my hunger. He can drink the best of wine, while I have to be content with water. Everything prospers with him, while nothing goes right with me, although I have hitherto tried to serve my God faithfully. But, my dear children, you should be satisfied with what you have received, says the heavenly Father: "Envy not the man who prospereth in his way: the man who doth unjust things" (Ps. 36:7). Do not grudge him his good luck; he to whom I have given something on earth is weak and sick in his soul; he will soon die of his illness, and that, too, an eternal death: "For they shall shortly wither away as grass: and as the green herbs shall quickly fall." And what has he received more than you, after all? Only a trifle! Oh, how false and wretched the happiness that disappears so speedily! With reason does St. Augustine exclaim:

The wicked man is in truth never happy, "but he is thought so, because we do not know what happiness is." If the sinner prospers while the just man suffers, do not be uneasy on that account; for, I ask again, how long will it last? A very short while. "For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be, and thou shalt seek his place, and shalt not find it" (Ps. 36:10). You will look around for some traces of his former prosperity, but you shall not find any. See how fleeting that happiness is. Many now abound in splendor and magnificence, in honor and authority, in joys and pleasures, in riches and wealth; "they take the timbrel, and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth" (Job 21:12, 13), while pious, just Christians, on the other hand, are poor and despicable in the sight of the world; they are oppressed with labors and trials, and have to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow.

But be not troubled at this. Wait till the end, till evening comes, till the hour of death, and then you will find that the difference between you and the wicked will be a consoling one for you, but a very deplorable one for them. When your souls, laden with the merits you have acquired by your patience and good works, are awaiting joyfully to have the gates of heaven opened to them, the wicked shall, against their will, be stripped of their gorgeous trappings, and be thrust naked and wretched into a place where they never thought of entering. "They spend their days in wealth," and what becomes of them afterwards? "and in a moment they go down to hell" (Job 21:13). The moment the breath leaves their bodies their souls are buried in hell. Oh, truly that is a sudden and terrible change! From a place of honor to a pit of infamy! From a splendid dwelling to the prison of hell! From a well garnished table to a lake of brimstone! From the soft down-bed to the burning coals, where their covering shall be flames of fire! From laughter and amusement to eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth! From joys to eternal woes! From the midst of their dear friends to the company of the demons and goblins of hell! How strange their first entry shall be to them! How long eternity shall appear to them, when their short-lived joys and pleasures have come to an end!

Hence the just must not envy the wicked their prosperity, but rejoice in their own trials. If it comes to such a wretched end with the wicked, who, then, should envy them on account of it, or complain that he has no share in it? Do not envy men the happiness they enjoy in this life, but rather condole with them, for, like dumb brutes fattening on the pastures, they are hastening to the butcher. Just servants of God, rejoice even in the midst of your sufferings, in your poverty and persecutions! Much more desirable are your tears than the laughter and rejoicings of the world! Much better your poverty and destitution than the wealth and abundance of sinners. “Better is one day in thy courts, oh, Lord! Than thousands in the houses of sinners,” and therefore with our whole heart let us say with David: “I have chosen to be an abject in the house of my God, rather than to dwell in the tabernacles of sinners.” Better to be the poorest and most abject amongst the suffering and weeping children of God than to dwell in the most magnificent palace amongst all the pleasures and enjoyments of the wicked!

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